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ABSTRACT

A seven item Likert-type scale was developed to measure self-righteousness, defined as the conviction that one's beliefs and actions are correct, especially in contrast to the beliefs and actions of others. The Self Righteousness Questionnaire (SRQ) measures three components of self-righteousness: belittlement, acceptance, and uncertainty. The instrument is designed for brevity and allows for the adjustment of items according to general or specific beliefs and behaviors. In order to test the validity and reliability of the SRQ, 111 adult runners (73 males, 38 females), aged 17-45, completed the SRQ before a 10 kilometer race. After the race 84 of those runners responded to a more specific version of the SRQ in a telephone interview. Test-retest correlations of the subscales were within the moderate range. Correlations of the items before and after the race showed responses to be remarkably stable. No sex differences were found on responses to any of the subscales. Although additional research is necessary, validity was somewhat supported by the study. Belittlement negatively correlated with loneliness and uncertainty positively correlated with loneliness and anxiety. No associations have been found between acceptance and other relevant constructs. (The SRQ and its specific adaptation for the post-race telephone survey are appended.) (BL)

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AN INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Anaheim, CA, August 26-30, 1983.

An instrument to measure self-righteousness

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This paper reports the results of two studies. The first study was designed to create a short, objective instrument to measure self righteousness. The second study tested the validity and reliability of the scales produced by the instrument developed in the first study.

Self-righteousness was defined here as the conviction that one's beliefs and actions are correct, especially in contrast with the beliefs and actions of others. These studies were motivated by the assumption that self-righteousness may have positive effects on an individual's mental health; yet, in a pluralistic democracy, self-righteousness may lead to an unhealthy society.

From the outset self-righteousness was regarded as a multidimensional construct combining at least two, central components: (1) certainty regarding one's own correctness and (2) belittlement of alternative viewpoints. It is argued here that self-righteousness is a defense mechanism that people use when they perceive that others disagree with them regarding proper beliefs or behavior.

Study One

The goal of the first study was to create a self-righteousness inventory that consisted of items independent of socially desirable responding, as well as dogmatism and intolerance for ambiguity. While self-righteousness, dogmatism, and ambiguity intolerance all represent some degree of closed-mindedness, they differ in key respects. The dogmatism scale contains many statements of political opinion (e.g., "Even though freedom of speech for all groups is a worthwhile goal, it is unfortunately necessary to restrict the freedom of certain political groups.") which make it appropriate for the investigation of political, but not necessarily other types of closed-mindedness. The self-righteousness scale was designed so that it would be appropriate for research involving a wide range of issues, including physical fitness and fundamentalist religion.

Self-righteousness differs from ambiguity intolerance in that the two represent different domains of closed-mindedness. Ambiguity intolerance concerns an individual's discomfort arising from information perceived as vague or inconsistent (e.g., "If I am uncertain about the responsibilities of a job, I get very anxious."). Self-righteousness is regarded here as not only arising from a perceived threat to ones values or beliefs but also as including a conviction that one's own beliefs/behaviors are correct, while alternatives are wrong.

Potential items, in the form of 140 complete sentences expressing an opinion, were generated by a group of 13 educational psychology graduate students and the first author. These items were evaluated in terms of their relevance to the definition of self-righteousness and redundancy with each other. Eighty-five items were regarded by the group (N=14) as diverging from the construct or being redundant, leaving the 55 items which appeared on the preliminary instrument. Each item was followed by a 5-point rating scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Twenty-six of the 55 items were worded such that they expressed opinions regarded as opposite to those thought to express self-righteousness. This instrument was entitled "Your Opinions Questionnaire" and was the first instrument of a series administered

to 120 subjects, ranging in age from 17-63 years. The other instruments were: Tolerance for Ambiguity (MAT-50, Norton, 1975), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970), Dogmatism Scale (Rokeach, 1956), Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1955), and the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978).

The 55 items were each correlated with the dogmatism, social desirability, and ambiguity tolerance scale scores. Nineteen items did not have a significant correlation with one or more of these scales. Scores from these 19 items were factor analyzed using a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. Although eight factors were produced by the first analysis, only three possessed eigenvalues greater than 1. Therefore, a second factor analysis was conducted which restricted the number of factors to be produced to three. Items were selected as loading on each factor if they had a value of .40 or greater.

The first factor produced by the second analysis had an eigenvalue of 1.51 and accounted for 42% of the variance. Two items loaded onto this factor: (1) People who disagree with me are wrong, (2) When people disagree with me, I figure they're just not up to my level of thinking. This first factor appears to measure the belittling of those who disagree with oneself. The second factor had an eignvalue of 1.06 and accounted for 29% of the variance. Two items loaded on the second factor: (1) One persons' opinions are just as valid as the next, (2) Most people naturally do the right thing. The second factor appears to measure the acceptance of others. The third factor had an eignvalue of 1.06 and also accounted for 29% of the variance. Three items loaded here: (1) One religion is just as good an another, (2) To me, things don't seem black and white, they're mostly shades of gray, (3) I am not convinced that my beliefs are the right beliefs. The third factor appears to measure uncertainty regarding beliefs. The remaining items failed to load onto any of these factors at the .40 level; all of the seven items that did load at this level had strong loadings on only one of these factors.

The items associated with each factor were added together and these scores were correlated with each other and with the other scale scores. The three factors were not significantly correlated with each other. However, two correlations of borderline significance were found. The first factor (belittling alternative viewpoints) was negatively correlated with the second (acceptance of others), $r(120)=-.22$, $p<.02$, and had no relationship to anxiety. The third factor (uncertainty) was positively related to loneliness, $r(120)=.24$, $p<.01$, and trait, not state, anxiety, $r(120)=.24$, $p<.01$.

These correlations point to the potential benefits of self-righteousness. That is, people who are certain of their beliefs and willing to belittle alternative viewpoints are less anxious and lonely than others. Not only does self-righteousness appear to reduce anxiety but it appears to bolster and individual's sense of group affiliation with like-minded individuals. No significant gender differences were found on any of the subscales; nor was age of subject significantly related to any of the subscales.

Study Two

The second study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the seven-item instrument developed in study one. This study consisted of a two-wave survey of individuals who registered to run in a 10 kilometer race. The first wave questionnaire, entitled "Capitol 10,000 Questionnaire", consisted of the seven items phrased to be specific to the race, named the Capitol 10,000. For example, the item, "People who disagree with me are wrong," was changed to, "People who disagree with me about entering the Capitol 10,000 are wrong." In addition, this survey asked subjects to indicate their goal in running the race, their age and sex, the number of miles per week and 10k races per year they ran, and their phone number after the race.

The subjects were 111 (73 men, 38 women) volunteers who were selected randomly as they came to pick up their T-shirts and race information packets. These volunteers ranged in age from 17 to 45 years. Of these, 84 could be reached by telephone after the race to participate in the second wave of the survey. This second survey consisted of the same seven self-righteousness items as in the first wave, plus an item asking subjects whether they ran the race and, if so, what their time was.

Table One presents the correlations of the seven items measured before

Table 1

Correlations of Seven Items Measured Before and After the Race

		Before Race						
		Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7
After Race	Item 1	.47*	.26*	.08	.17	.06	.13	.25*
	Item 2	.15	.46*	-.21*	.04	-.03	.32*	-.12
	Item 3	-.09	-.21	.43*	-.01	-.07	-.06	-.08
	Item 4	.09	-.08	.02	.58*	-.01	.04	.29*
	Item 5	.07	-.06	-.03	-.11	.60*	.13	.15
	Item 6	.06	.24*	-.30*	.04	.13	.56*	.03
	Item 7	.29*	.17	.12	.04	.25*	.02	.29*

N=77 *p<.05.

the race with the same items responded to after the race. As you can see, each item taken before the race had its highest correlation with the same item, taken after the race. In only one case did an item correlate as highly with another (item 7 with item 4); note that both of these items load onto the same subscale, uncertainity. These results suggest that the subjects' responses to the items were remarkably stable, especially considering that their self-righteousness about running the race could have changed as a result of having run the race.

In addition, no gender differences were found. There was a significant negative association between age and belittling others, both before, $r(100) = -.26$, $p < .005$, and after the race, $r(76) = -.20$ $p < .04$. Younger runners belittled others more than older runners.

First wave scores for the three subcales were correlated with the same scores derived from the second wave survey. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlations of Three Subscale Scores Measured Before and After the Race

After Race	Before Race		
	Belittlement	Acceptance	Uncertainty
Belittlement	.53*	-.08	.15
Acceptance	-.16	.50*	.13
Uncertainty	.04	-.02	.65*

N=75 *p<.05.

As you can see from Table 2, the highest correlations were found on the diagonal of this matrix. For example, subscale one (belittlement) scores collected before the race had the highest correlation with belittlement scores collected after the race. These correlations suggest that these three subscales are reliable measures of belittlement, acceptance, and uncertainty.

In order to test the validity of the self-righteousness scales, the 84 subjects who participated in both waves of the survey were grouped according to whether they had achieved their goal in running. Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) would predict that self-righteousness about a specific behavior would be related to whether an individual had achieved his or her behavioral goal. Arguing from a Lewininan perspective, Wicklund and Gollwitzer state that people experience a pressure within themselves to attain specific goals. If progress towards achieving these goals is temporarily blocked, individuals become increasingly impatient and resort to a variety of ways to release this pressure. It is argued here that self-righteousness about attaining the specified goal is one of the ways individuals cope with such a temporary blockage.

Four groups of subjects emerged. First, some (N=6) did not run the race. Second, some (N=15) ran the race faster than their goal. Third, some (N=33) ran the race slower than their goal. Fourth, some (N=22) had the goal of simply finishing the race, regardless of the time it took, and they did finish.

On the basis of symbolic self-completion theory, one would expect the subjects who finished faster than their goal to express the least self-righteousness about running the race. In addition, those who had planned to run, but did not run the race, would be expected to express a higher amount of self-righteousness than would those who had surpassed their goals. Those who reached their goal of simply finishing the race would be expected to express less self-righteousness than those who failed to achieve their goal.

The mean subscale scores that produced a significant F associated with the four goal groups are presented in Table 3. Only one subscale, belittlement, produced a significant F. Although no significant differences between the four groups were found on the three subscale scores taken before the race, the groups differed significantly on their post-race belittlement scores, $F(3,75) = 2.87$, $p < .04$. A series of planned comparisons indicated that those who finished faster than their goal belittled alternative viewpoints less than any other group. No differences were found between the other three groups on mean belittlement scores. That is, those who ran slower than expected or not at all were not significantly different from those whose goal it was to finish and did.

These results suggest that only those who have specific goals and surpass them are tolerant of alternative viewpoints regarding their goals. Those who tried, but failed to reach their specific goals and those who did

Table 3

Mean Post-Race Belittlement Scores by Group

Subscale	Group			
Belittlement	Better than Goal (N=15)	Worse than Goal (N=33)	Finished (N=22)	Did Not Run (N=6)
	3.20[a]	4.85[b]	5.00[b]	4.50[b]

Note: N=76 Means with different suprascripts are significantly different.

not run belittled others more than those who surpassed their goal. Interestingly, and contrary to prediction, those who had the general goal of finishing the race and did accomplish it, scored high on the belittlement scale. Perhaps the generalness of their goal indicated a tentativeness about their committment to the goal, or a fear of failure that the other three groups did not have. Because they minimalized their goal, they may not have experienced the release of pressure to achieve that characterized those who surpassed their goal.

The failure of the other two subscales to differentiate the groups may indicate that acceptance of others and uncertainty may not be relevant constructs to the act of reaching one's goals in running a race. Future research needs to be devoted to determining whether these two subscales are useful in discriminating goal achievement groups.

Conclusion

Overall, then, the results of these two studies provide a 7-item scale, measuring three components of self-righteousness. The brevity of the scale makes it easy to administer. Further, the items can be general or adjusted to specify the beliefs and behavior particular to the area of study, such as physical fitness political activism, or religious convictions. The second study demonstrated that the instrument could be used in telephone interviews. The test-retest correlations of the subscales are in the moderate range. However, strong correlations of subscales with themselves indicates the factor structure does maintain its integrity over time and administrative settings.

An additional attribute of the Self-Righteousness Questionnaire (SRQ) is that it is not redundant with already existing scales designed to measure dogmatism and ambiguity tolerance. Scores on the subscales of the SRQ do not correlate with scales measuring socially desirable response sets. No sex differences have been found on responses to any of the three subscales.

Although additional research is necessary to establish the validity of the three subscales of the SRQ, the information produced by the two studies is supportive. First, belittlement of alternative viewpoints was negatively correlated with loneliness. This suggests that people who belittle alternative viewpoints feel more a part of some social network than those who do less belittling. In addition, runners who surpassed their goals belittled others less than people who didn't achieve their goal. This suggests that once one has satisfied one's goals, one can express greater tolerance of alternative viewpoints. Second, uncertainty about one's beliefs and behavior was found to be positively related to loneliness and anxiety. This suggests the possession of a conviction that one is correct is associated with the sense of belonging to a social network and lower levels of chronic anxiety. To date, no associations have been found between the acceptance of others subscale and scales measuring potentially relevant constructs.

The SRQ is available for use to anyone willing to share his/her results with the authors. Inquiries and information should be sent to: Dr. Toni Falbo, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712

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Sex: __Male __Female Age:_____

YOUR OPINIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

The following statements represent commonly held opinions that you may or may not agree with. For each item, indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement, as it refers to yourself, by circling the letter (A,B,C,D, or E) that best represents you.

1. People who disagree with me are wrong.

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree

2. When people disagree with me, I figure they're just not up to my level of thinking.

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree

3. One person's opinions are just as valid as the next.

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree

4. Most people naturally do the right thing.

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree

5. One religion is just as good as another.

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree

6. To me, things don't seem black and white, they're mostly shades of gray.

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree

7. I am not convinced that my beliefs are the right beliefs.

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree

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RA_____

PHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME_____ PHONE NO._____

1. Were you able to run the Capitol 10,000?_____

2. If yes, what was your time?

The following statements represent commonly held opinions that you may or may not agree with. After each statement, I will state 5 options that express degrees of agreement or disagreement with the statement. Let me know the extent of your agreement with the statement by telling me which one of these five options best represents you.

1. ONE FORM OF EXERCISE IS JUST AS GOOD AS ANOTHER.

A	B	C	D	E
STRONGLY AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

2. PEOPLE WHO DISAGREE WITH ME ABOUT ENTERING THE CAPITOL 10,000 ARE WRONG.

A	B	C	D	E
STRONGLY AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

3. ONE PERSON'S OPINIONS ABOUT ENTERING THE CAPITOL 10,000 ARE JUST AS VALID AS THE NEXT.

A	B	C	D	E
STRONGLY AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

4. TO ME, THE DECISION TO ENTER THE CAPITOL 10,000 WASN'T BLACK AND WHITE, IT WAS MOSTLY SHADES OF GRAY.

A	B	C	D	E
STRONGLY AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

5. MOST PEOPLE NATURALLY DO THE RIGHT THING WHEN IT COMES TO ENTERING THE CAPITOL 10,000.

A	B	C	D	E
STRONGLY AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

6. WHEN PEOPLE DISAGREE WITH ME ABOUT ENTERING THE CAPITOL 10,000, I FIGURE THEY'RE JUST NOT UP TO MY LEVEL OF THINKING.

A	B	C	D	E
STRONGLY AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

7. I AM NOT CONVINCED THAT MY BELIEFS ABOUT ENTERING THE CAPITOL 10,000 ARE THE RIGHT BELIEFS.

A	B	C	D	E
STRONGLY AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE